

Lama Aria Drolma

*Building a Strong Foundation: Four Guided Meditations*

Week 4: "Tonglen for Self-Compassion"

September 26, 2020



Hello and welcome back to this Tricycle online Dharma Talk series. My name is Lama Arya Drolma and I will be continuing week four of the Dharma Talk series titled "Building A Strong Foundation." This week I'll lead a guided meditation on self-love and compassion. In the last week's session, I spoke about *tonglen* meditation practice. In Tibetan, the word *tonglen* means "sending and taking." It refers to being willing to take in the pain and suffering of oneself and others and to send out lovingkindness and compassion to oneself and others.

In today's meditation session I want to emphasize self-compassion, lovingkindness to oneself, and self-love. Self-compassion is so important to our well-being. It helps us shift from self-criticism and judgment to self-care, warmth, and love. Rather than judging ourselves harshly, we can acknowledge our feeling in the moment, which may be anger, shame, frustration, etc., and recognize that these moments are a part of the shared human experience. Self-compassion is a very important aspect of well-being.

The recognition that we are all imperfect and make mistakes becomes a way to connect deeply with ourselves and others. There may be differences in our experiences yet they can also be a deep appreciation of similarity, even unity of the human experience. In the practice of self-compassion, we have a way to broaden and expand our connection to self and others rather than disconnect in the face of pain and suffering. We learn to cultivate happiness and openness to experience. Through this openness, we begin to discover a fuller range of responses in the face of challenge. So we learn to cultivate openness to experience, and through this openness, we begin to discover a fuller range of responses in the face of challenge. If there's anything we need to do during this current situation around the world, it is definitely plenty of lovingkindness and compassion for oneself.

Now we will do the lovingkindness and compassion guided meditation. In today's *tonglen* meditation practice, we will learn to cultivate love and compassion for one's self, and be present for our suffering. So here in this practice, we start first with oneself. We often find it difficult to allow ourselves to receive genuine love from others. For many of us, we find it easier to love others rather than receive love. In this meditation, if we notice our defenses arising against allowing love in, we simply open up to receiving it. Our innate true nature is one of lovingkindness and compassion. So we are just getting in touch with our innate nature which can heal and liberate us from all our suffering.

This practice of *tonglen* meditation, of taking and sending for yourself or oneself, is recommended by the great master Kalu Rinpoche, who's the lineage holder of the Shangpa



lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, and is also in the writings of the Shangpa lineage master Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, the great 19th-century master. These very profound teachings originated by the great Buddhist Indian master Atisha in the 10th century.

So how do we do lovingkindness and compassion meditation on oneself? It's very simple. To start, imagine a brilliant light of unconditional lovingkindness and compassion in your heart center. Then just imagine your ordinary human self sitting in front of you and facing yourself. Just watch to see any aspect of suffering that arises in yourself, such as unworthiness, anger, regret, fear, or unhappiness, and just open up to it. Be fearless as it rises. Be the observer without any judgment. So the key point is whatever arises, just be open to it, and just be the observer. Then breathe normally. As you breathe out from your heart center, visualize a brilliant white light going out to you, sitting in front of you, and transform your suffering into love, compassion, and healing energy. Just imagine yourself being fully healed and rest in that present moment of awareness.

Now repeat this process again and again. You can synchronize the meditation with your breath. But if you can't synchronize it, that's okay as well. Always remember to breathe naturally, normally, and gently. So when we start the meditation session, there are two essential points. The first essential point is your body, set up straight, and the second is your mind. It's the mind that actually does the meditation, so the mind should be relaxed in the present moment of awareness. This means if your mind is still in the office or somewhere else, bring your mind's attention to the present moment.

So, today during the meditation, we are putting our attention on our breath combined with lovingkindness and compassion in your mindstream. Okay, let's put our attention on our breath, feeling each breath as it comes in and goes out. Letting the breath just be as it is without trying to change or regulate it in any way. Allowing it to flow easily and naturally with its own rhythm and pace. Again, check to see if you're sitting upright. Be comfortable, be relaxed. Inhale and exhale; breathe normally.

As you breathe in, bring the feeling of unconditional love and kindness into your mindstream. As you breathe out, just imagine you're sending out pure love, kindness, and compassion, in the form of brilliant white light from your heart center to yourself, who's sitting in front of you. All your suffering is instantly transformed and you're filled with happiness and joy. Just rest in that present moment of awareness and see yourself being fully healed of all your suffering.

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Now repeat the process again and again. You don't have to do it with every breath, you can rest in the feeling of being happy and heal. You can reflect and be open to the feeling of pain or suffering you may be experiencing right now. Contemplate any hardship or heartaches you've experienced in your life and open up to the feeling of love and compassion for yourself. Contemplate the natural goodness in yourself: all the wonderful qualities that already you have, such as kindness, generosity, and love.

This practice is a powerful internal shift from self-fixation to a larger awareness. It shifts us from a victim mentality to mentality of love and compassion. So tonglen meditation practice is extremely profound. It's one of the bravest practices that one can do. There's so much healing in this meditation technique. The practice is very beneficial and has helped people deal with their own fears around dying, pain, grief, and loss, and gives them great strength and courage. This is one of the jewels of the Tibetan meditations; cultivating our compassionate nature, bringing about positive energy to oneself, and having that large-heartedness to be empathetic with others.

Thank you. Thank you for joining me for the Dharma Talk series. I'm so honored and happy to be part of this Tricycle online Dharma Talk series. Wishing you all love, happiness, and blessings.